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# MAN OF DESTINY



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8 Terrific Issues Every Month

# Man of Destiny



FOR PRIVATE POPPOLI,  
THE WAR ENDED IN  
SEPTEMBER 1943 WHEN  
ITALY SURRENDERED.  
AFTER THAT, IT WAS  
JUST A MATTER OF  
GETTING HOME. BUT  
HOME, FOR PRIVATE  
POPPOLI, WAS THREE  
HUNDRED MILES AND  
A LOAD OF TROUBLE  
AWAY

Chapter 1. **HOMEWARD BOUND**

SEPTEMBER 8, 1943, WAS THE DAY ON WHICH THE TIDE OF WAR WASHED UP TO THE BEACHES OF ITALY. ONE OF THE EIGHTH ARMY LANDINGS WAS AT CHIARO IN CALABRIA .



INTO THE BULLET-LASHED SURF SPLASHED THE BRITISH INVADERS. BEHIND FIXED BAYONETS, THEY WADED FORWARD.



IT WAS THE GERMAN WEHRMACHT, HURRIEDLY FLUNG INTO POSITION, WHICH DISPUTED THE BRITISH LANDING. THE MEN ON BOTH SIDES WERE VETERANS. THEY FOUGHT VIOLENTLY . . .



FOR THREE YEARS THE ITALIANS, PRODDED BY THEIR FASCIST LEADERS, HAD WAGED TEPID WAR ON THE GERMAN SIDE. NOW THE BATTLE WAS ON THEIR OWN DOORSTEP AND THEY SWEATED BETWEEN TWO FIRES . . .



## Man Of Destiny

TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE BRITISH INVASION, THE ITALIAN DICTATOR MUSSOLINI HAD BEEN DEPOSED BY HIS OWN PEOPLE. ALREADY A SURRENDER HAD BEEN ARRANGED ...

SEE THAT WHACKING BIG BARRACKS BACK OF THE TOWN, SIR? GUNS ARE LOBBING A SALVO ON TO IT . . . SHOULD KEEP THE EYTIES QUIET!

ONE SALVO ONLY, NUMBER ONE . . . WE DON'T WANT THE EYTIES TO CHANGE THEIR MINDS!

THE OFFICIAL ORDER TO LAY DOWN THEIR ARMS REACHED THE GARRISON OF THE ITALIAN BARRACKS AT THE SAME TIME AS THE SALVO FROM THE BRITISH WARSHIP . . .

CAPITANO! CAPITANO! SPLENDID NEWS!

SAPRISTI! THE ENEMY BOMBARDS US! FOR THIS I WILL NOT STAND!

THE NEWS, AND HIS MEN'S  
DELIGHTED RECEPTION OF  
IT, DISGUSTED CAPITANO  
MASTRIANO . . .

ON THE WIRELESS, CAPITANO...  
THE WAR IS OVER FOR US! THE  
MARSHAL ORDERS US TO LAY  
DOWN OUR ARMS!

MIRACOLOSO!

PAH! BUT FOR THIS I WOULD  
HAVE BUNDLED THE IMPERTINENT  
INGLESE BACK INTO THE SEA!  
IT IS LUCKY FOR THEM.

A STRAY SHELL BLEW HOT AIR INTO  
THE WATCH TOWER. THE BELLIGERENT  
CAPITANO BEAT A STRATEGIC  
RETREAT . . .

HOWEVER, IT IS A  
SOLDIER'S DUTY TO OBEY  
ORDERS! STAY HERE, MEN!  
I SHALL GO BELOW TO . . .  
TO PUT MY PAPERS  
IN ORDER!

## Man Of Destiny

FOR THREE YEARS OF THE MOST SAVAGE WAR IN HISTORY, THE QUIETEST SPOT IN THE QUIET BACKWATER OF SUNNY CHIARO HAD BEEN CAPITANO MASTRIANO'S REGIMENTAL OFFICE . . . .

AH, POPPOLI! STILL AT YOUR POST! AT LEAST ONE OF MY SOLDIERS SHOWS A SELFLESS DEVOTION TO DUTY!

ONE MOMENT, CAPITANO . . .  
BOOTS, PAIRS OF, THREE THOUSAND . . .  
BRUSHES, BOOT, THREE THOUSAND  
AND THREE . . . BRACES, SEVEN  
HUNDRED AND TWO . . .

8  
1943



IT WAS THERE, WITH A PEN AND A RUBBER STAMP, THAT PRIVATE POPPOLI HAD FOUGHT HIS WAR . . .

NOISY CHAPS, THE GERMANS, CAPITANO. I SUPPOSE THEY'RE HOLDING MANOEUVRES ON THE BEACH AGAIN. SUCH BANGS . . .

BANGS, PRIVATE POPPOLI?  
YOU HAVE NOT HEARD? FOR US  
THE WAR IS OVER. ITALY HAS  
SURRENDERED AND HER WARRIORS  
MUST LAY DOWN THEIR ARMS . . .



PRIVATE POPPOLI DID NOT LAY DOWN HIS ARMS. HE CLIPPED THEM IN HIS POCKET . . .

YOU DON'T SAY, CAPITANO . . .  
SO THE WAR IS OVER . . . WELL,  
WELL, WELL . . .



PRIVATE POPPOLI STOOD UP BUSILY . . .

POPPOLI . . . WHAT  
ARE YOU DOING?



PRIVATE POPPOLI PICKED UP HIS ATTACHE CASE . . .

POPPOLI . . . WHAT  
ARE YOU PACKING?

JUST A SLICE OF  
SALAMI, CAPITANO, AND A BIT OF  
COLD MACARONI AND A COUPLE OF  
GERKINS. WALKING MAKES A  
CHAP HUNGRY. WELL . . .  
I THINK THAT'S ALL . . .

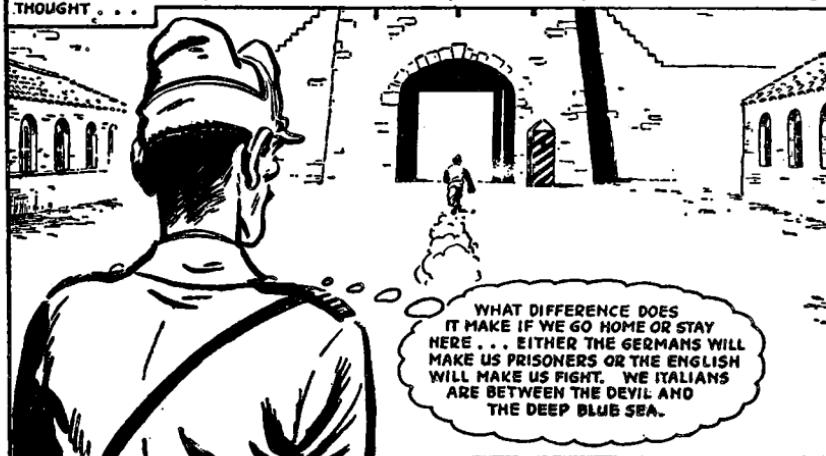


## Man Of Destiny

HIS CAP ON HIS HEAD, HIS ATTACHE CASE IN HIS HAND, PRIVATE POPPOLI STARTED FOR THE DOOR . . .



SO PRIVATE POPPOLI WALKED OUT OF THE BARRACKS, OUT OF CHIARO, OUT OF THE WAR. OR SO HE THOUGHT . . .



PRIVATE POPPOLI, TROTTING NORTHWARDS, DID NOT THINK ABOUT DEVILS OR DEEP BLUE SEAS. HE THOUGHT HAPPILY ABOUT CASTELMONTE. HE THOUGHT ABOUT HIS DESK IN THE TOWN HALL THERE.



FINALLY HE THOUGHT ABOUT SALAMI. HE HAD COVERED FIVE MILES AND HE HAD TWO HUNDRED AND NINETY FIVE MILES TO GO, BUT THE SUN WAS HOT AND HE WAS HUNGRY . . .

AH . . . ONE OF THOSE LITTLE HILLOCKS WILL DO! SUCH A LOVELY DAY FOR EATING IN THE OPEN. I MUST SAY, PEACE IS VERY NICE . . .



## Man Of Destiny

HE WAS EATING A GHERKIN, HIS BACK AGAINST THE HILLOCK, WHEN A CLOUD OF DUST CAME BOWLING ALONG THE ROAD FROM CHIARO. HE WATCHED IT APPROACH WITHOUT ALARM . . .



THE VEHICLES WERE ACTUALLY BRITISH JEEPS OF THE SPECIAL AIR SERVICE. THEY HAD BEACHED NORTH OF THE MAIN LANDINGS AT CHIARO AND WERE PROBING THE GERMAN DEFENCES INLAND . . .

SHALL WE PICK THE EYIE UP AND GRILL HIM, CAPTAIN?



PRIVATE POPPOLI DID LOOK PEACEFUL. HE FELT PEACEFUL. BUT IT WAS THE LAST TIME HE WOULD FIND ANY PEACE FOR EIGHT MONTHS ON THE LONG ROAD HOME.



THE HILLOCK BY WHICH PRIVATE POPPOLI HAD EATEN HIS LUNCH WAS THE TURRET OF A CUNNINGLY-CAMOUFLAGED GERMAN PANTHER TANK. 'THE TREE TRUNK' WAS ITS GUN. THE GUN WENT OFF VERY LOUDLY BESIDE PRIVATE POPPOLI'S EAR

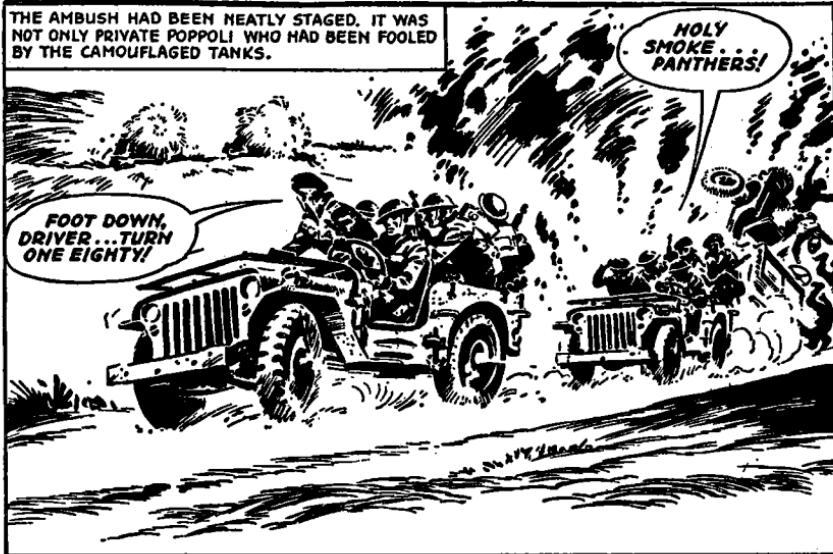


## Man Of Destiny

THE AMBUSH HAD BEEN NEATLY STAGED. IT WAS NOT ONLY PRIVATE POPPOLI WHO HAD BEEN FOOLED BY THE CAMOUFLAGED TANKS.

HOLY SMOKE...  
PANTHERS!

FOOT DOWN,  
DRIVER... TURN  
ONE EIGHTY!



TWO JEEPS HAD BEEN HIT. THE OTHER TWO MADE A FAST U-TURN WHICH TOOK THE GERMAN GUNNERS BY SURPRISE. THEY ACCELERATED BACK ALONG THE ROAD, TOMMY GUNS SPITTING DEFIAENCE . . .

CLIMB  
ABOARD, MEN . . .  
BOUNCE LEAD OFF THE  
BLIGHTERS, THE REST  
OF YOU!

I WONDER WHAT  
HAPPENED TO THAT LITTLE  
ETIE, SIR?



IN ALL HIS THREE YEARS OF WAR, THE LOUDEST NOISE PRIVATE POPPOLI HAD HEARD WAS THE SCRATCHING OF HIS PEN. NOW ALL HELL WAS HUMMING ABOUT HIS EARS



MAMMA MIA!

THE STEEL HATCH OF THE NEAREST PANTHER CLANGED OPEN AS THE TWO BRITISH JEEPS WITHDREW AT HIGH SPEED. A SQUARE BLOND HEAD APPEARED IN THE TURRET



CEASE FIRE!  
THE BRITISH SCUTTLE AWAY!  
LET US HOPE THEY HAVE  
LEARNED THEIR LESSON!

MAJOR KURT BERG, OF THE SIXTH PANZER DIVISION, WAS IN A GOOD HUMOUR. HIS VOICE WAS AS SOFT AS A BLUNT STEEL FILE

SO! THE ITALIAN WHO ACTED AS OUR DECOY! GET UP, LITTLE MAN, I WISH TO THANK YOU!



PRIVATE POPPOLI HAD EXPERIENCED THREE AND A HALF MINUTES OF THE SHOOTING WAR. IT WAS QUITE ENOUGH FOR HIM...

THE GENERAL IS KIND . . . WHERE'S MY ATTACHE CASE? BUT THERE'S REALLY NO NEED TO THANK ME . . .

AH, BUT I INSIST, LITTLE MAN, AND TO SHOW MY GRATITUDE, I SHALL ALLOW YOU TO GUIDE MY UNIT TO CASTROVELLERI . . . INSTEAD OF BEING SHOT!

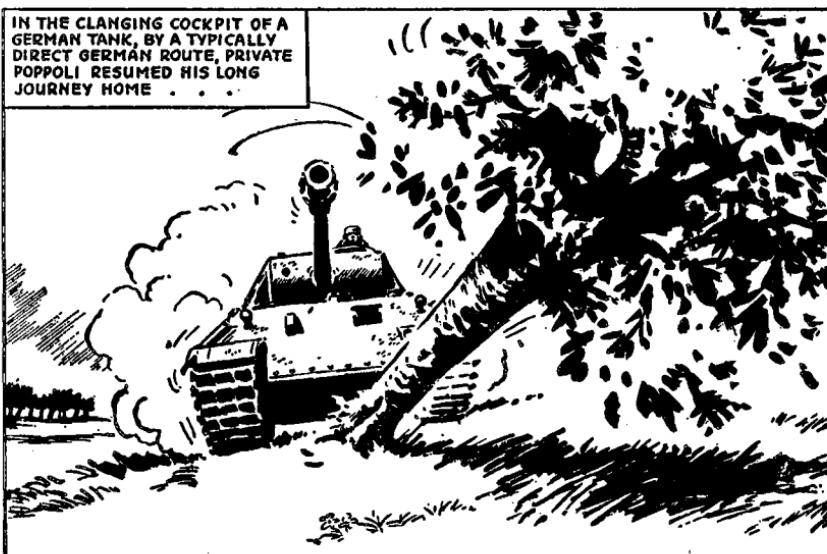


SIX FEET OF MILITARY MUSCLE  
EXPANDED MENACINGLY OVER  
THE LITTLE ITALIAN PRIVATE . . .

BUT, GENERAL . . .  
I'M A NEUTRAL . . .  
IT'S YOUR WAR, NOT  
MINE . . . SURELY  
YOU KNOW . . .

I KNOW THAT YOU  
ARE A MISERABLE SHIRKER,  
ITALIAN . . . LIKE ALL YOUR  
COUNTRYMEN! TO ME, YOU  
ARE A PRISONER WHO  
EITHER OBEYS OR DIES!  
WHICH IS IT TO BE,  
EH?

IN THE CLANGING COCKPIT OF A  
GERMAN TANK, BY A TYPICALLY  
DIRECT GERMAN ROUTE, PRIVATE  
POPPOLI RESUMED HIS LONG  
JOURNEY HOME . . .



Chapter 2. **BETWEEN TWO FIRES**

AN HOUR LATER, THE TWO PANTHERS CLANKED INTO THE MAIN SQUARE OF CASTROVELLERI. IT WAS THRONGED WITH INFANTRY OF THE SIXTH PANZERS. MAJOR BERG SWUNG DOWN MASTERFULLY . . .

YOU SEE, ITALIAN? THE WEHRMACHT IS READY TO THROW THE BRITISH BACK INTO THE SEA. AND **YOU** WILL HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF ASSISTING US! LET US DRINK TO OUR PARTNERSHIP!



AFTER HIS FOURTH GLASS OF CHIANTI, MAJOR BERG BECAME EXPANSIVE. EVEN THE TIMID PRIVATE POPPOLI HAD CEASED TO PERSPIRE . . .

IN FACT, SIPPING HIS CHIANTI IN THE SHADY WARMTH AFTER THE MAJOR HAD GONE, PRIVATE POPPOLI BEGAN TO FEEL QUITE PEACEFUL AGAIN . . .



WELL, I'M FIFTEEN MILES NEARER CASTELMONTE THAN I WAS THIS MORNING . . . BEING A PRISONER ISN'T SO BAD AFTER ALL. I THINK I'M GOING TO LIKE IT.

HUH?



SUDDENLY, TWO BRITISH JEEPS EXPLODED INTO THE MAIN SQUARE OF CASTROVELLERI AND A GERMAN SCHMEISSER TORE THE AIR APART TWO INCHES FROM PRIVATE POPPOLI'S EAR . . . .

TALLY-HO, TROOPS!

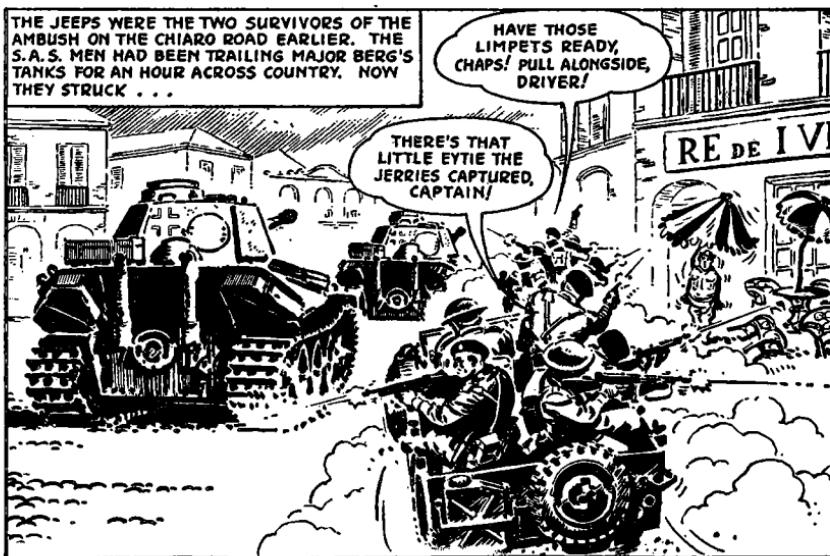
HIMMEL... ENGLANDERS!

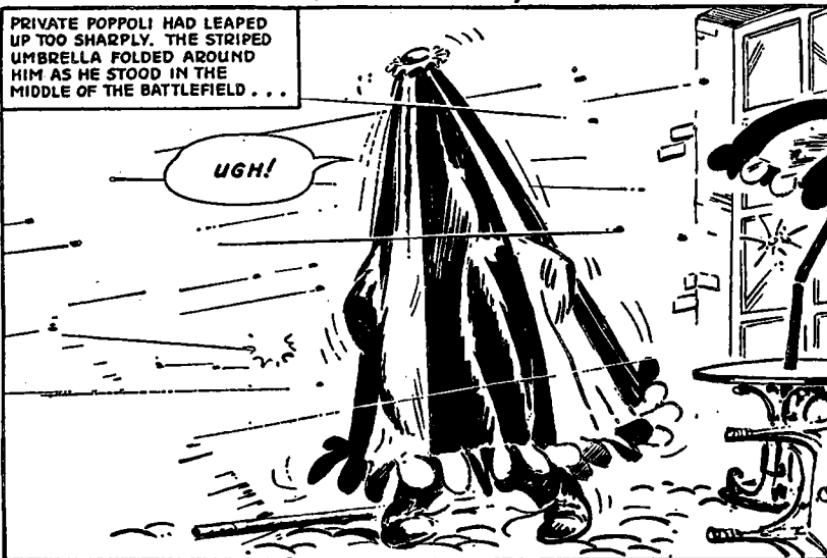


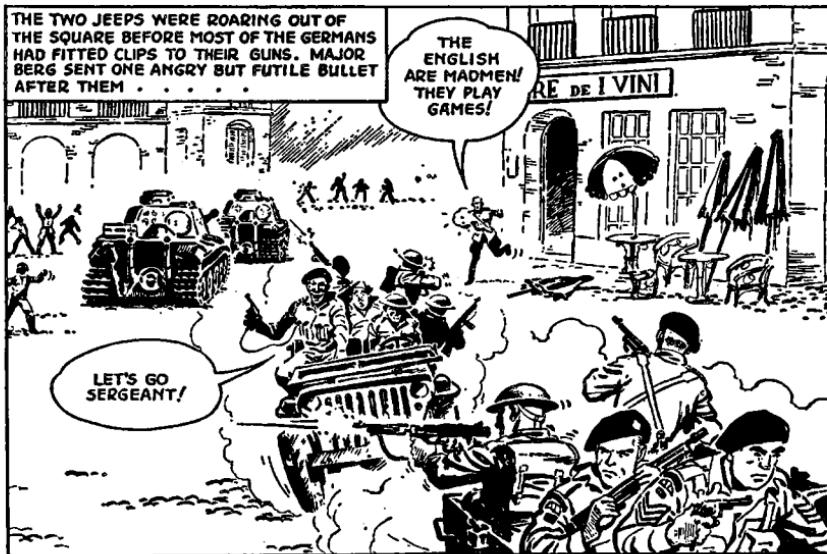
THE JEEPS WERE THE TWO SURVIVORS OF THE AMBUSH ON THE CHIARO ROAD EARLIER. THE S.A.S. MEN HAD BEEN TRAILING MAJOR BERG'S TANKS FOR AN HOUR ACROSS COUNTRY. NOW THEY STRUCK . . .

HAVE THOSE LIMPETS READY, CHAPS! PULL ALONGSIDE, DRIVER!

THERE'S THAT LITTLE EYTYE THE JERRIES CAPTURED, CAPTAIN!







## Man Of Destiny

DEAFENED, SHAKEN, BEWILDERED, PRIVATE POPPOLI UNSCREWED HIS EYES . . .

YOU ARE THE INGLESE  
THOSE GERMANS SHELLED  
ON THE ROAD . . . YOU  
DIDN'T COME ALL THIS  
WAY FOR ME, DID  
YOU?

NO,  
OLD CHAP  
... NOT  
EXACTLY . . .



CAPTAIN BASIL CHAMPNEY LOOKED BACK IN TIME  
TO SEE HIS LIMPET BOMBS WRECK THE TWO  
GERMAN TANKS. HIS MOUSTACHE TWITCHED  
APPRECIATIVELY . . .

WE COULDN'T LET JERRY TAKE THE  
FIRST ROUND AND GET AWAY WITH IT,  
COULD WE, CHAPS?



SIX MILES BACK TOWARDS CHIARO, THE JEEPS  
TURNED OFF THE ROAD AND BUMPED INTO A  
ROCKY GULLY. THE REST OF CAPTAIN CHAMPNEY'S  
SPECIAL AIR SERVICE UNIT WERE LEAGUERED  
THERE . . .

WELL, GENERAL . . .  
ARRIVEDERCI . . . I'M WALKING  
HOME! IF YOU'LL  
EXCUSE ME . . .



ON HIS FIRST DAY OF PEACE, PRIVATE POPPOLI WAS BEGINNING TO LEARN ABOUT WAR . . .

FUN? BUT WAR IS A BUSINESS, GENERAL . . .



PRIVATE POPPOLI HUNG AROUND WITH THE S.A.S. UNIT. HE HAD NO CHOICE. ONE DAY, TWO WEEKS LATER . . .

AH, POPPOLI, OLD CHAP . . . SORRY WE'VE BEEN GIVING YOU SUCH A DULL TIME LATELY, BUT I'VE GOT NEWS FOR YOU. WE'RE MAKING A BIG PUSH NORTHWARDS AND YOU'RE COMING WITH US AS A GUIDE.

NORTHWARDS,  
GENERAL . . . MIRACOLOSO . . . BUT THERE WON'T BE ANY TROUBLE, WILL THERE?



CAPTAIN CHAMPNEY'S UNIT WAS QUARTERED IN A FARMHOUSE AT POTENZA. PRIVATE POPPOLI HAD BEEN GIVEN A HARMLESS JOB IN COMPANY HEADQUARTERS.



THE PROSPECT OF A MOVE NEARER TO HIS HOME TOWN AND A PLEASANT OUTING DELIGHTED THE LITTLE ITALIAN PRIVATE. NEXT DAY HE LINED UP WITH THE S.A.S MEN AND WAS GIVEN A BULKY PACK . . .



THEI LOADED JEEP DROVE EAST OUT OF  
POTENZA AND TURNED ON TO THE BUMPY  
GRASS OF A R.A.F. ADVANCED AIRFIELD.  
TWO DAKOTAS WERE WARMING UP THERE . . .

SO WE GO  
FOR OUR PICNIC BY  
AEROPLANE,  
DO WE?

THAT'S THE GENERAL  
IDEA, POPPOLI, OLD CHAP!  
CHECK THE MEN ABOARD,  
SERGEANT!

SOMEONE HAD STRAPPED THE BULKY PACK  
TO PRIVATE POPPOLI'S BACK BEFORE HE  
BOARDED THE DAKOTA. IT MADE A REALLY  
COMFORTABLE CUSHION. HE WAS QUITE  
EXCITED . . .

THIS IS BETTER THAN  
WALKING . . . YOU WAIT TILL  
I TELL THEM AT HOME ABOUT  
THIS ENGLISH PICNIC.

COR, I TAKE BACK  
ALL I SAID ABOUT THE ETTIES  
. . . HE'S ACTUALLY ENJOYING  
THIS TRIP, THE LITTLE  
GEEZER!



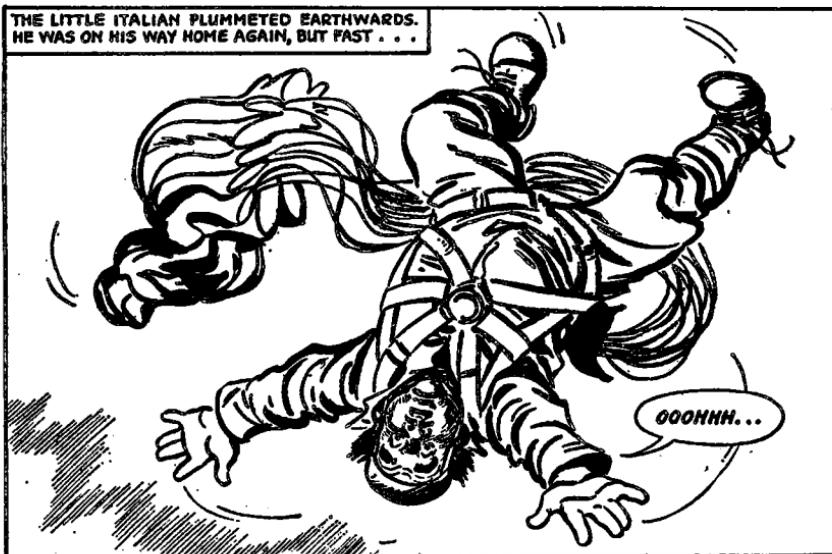
PRIVATE POPPOLI REACHED THE OPEN DOOR IN THE FUSELAGE. HE LOOKED OUT  
HE GROANED . . .



A LARGE HAND PROPELLED PRIVATE POPPOLI INTO TEN THOUSAND FEET OF STOMACH-LURCHING EMPTINESS . . .



THE LITTLE ITALIAN PLUMMETED EARTHWARDS.  
HE WAS ON HIS WAY HOME AGAIN, BUT FAST . . .



TWO HUNDRED FEET AND A LIFETIME LATER, HIS PARACHUTE OPENED WITH A SNAP. HE SWUNG GENTLY ON HIS HARNESS. THE SKY BELOW WAS DOTTED WITH DRIFTING MEN . . .



SIX THOUSAND FEET BELOW, ON A FOREST ROAD NEAR LARINO, TWO TRUCKS AND A STAFF CAR OF THE GERMAN SIXTH PANZER DIVISION SCREECHED TO A HALT. THE HARSH VOICE BELONGED TO MAJOR KURT BERG . . .

HERR MAJOR! BRITISH PARATROOPS!

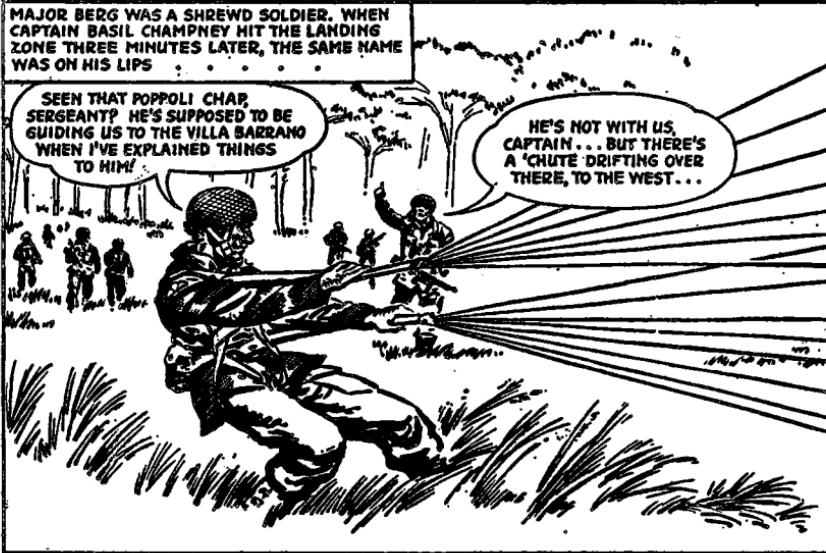
I DID NOT THINK THEY WERE MUSHROOMS, FOOL! WE WILL CUT THROUGH THE WOODS, MEN! IT IS THE VILLA BARRANO AND ITS SECRETS THE ENGLISH ARE AFTER!



MAJOR BERG WAS A SHREWD SOLDIER. WHEN CAPTAIN BASIL CHAMPNEY HIT THE LANDING ZONE THREE MINUTES LATER, THE SAME NAME WAS ON HIS LIPS . . .

SEEN THAT POPPOLI CHAP, SERGEANT? HE'S SUPPOSED TO BE GUIDING US TO THE VILLA BARRANO WHEN I'VE EXPLAINED THINGS TO HIM!

HE'S NOT WITH US, CAPTAIN . . . BUT THERE'S A 'CHUTE DRIFTING OVER THERE, TO THE WEST . . .



THE PARACHUTE DRIFTING TO THE WEST WAS PRIVATE POPPOLI'S. A FLIKE OF WIND HAD CARRIED HIM AWAY FROM THE LANDING ZONE. THE TREES WERE SWINGING UP TO MEET HIM WITH ALARMING SPEED . . .



THE BRANCHES OF A TALL PINE SNARED THE CHUTE-RISERS OF THE LITTLE ITALIAN. HE HAD CLOSED HIS EYES AS THE TREES RUSHED UP TO MEET HIM. THE JOLT KNOCKED ALL THE WIND OUT OF HIM . . .



## Man Of Destiny

HALF A MILE TO THE EAST, CAPTAIN BASIL CHAMPNEY LED HIS MEN INTO THE TREES. FOR THOSE VETERANS OF THE SPECIAL AIR SERVICE, A DROP OVER ENEMY TERRITORY WAS ROUTINE . . .

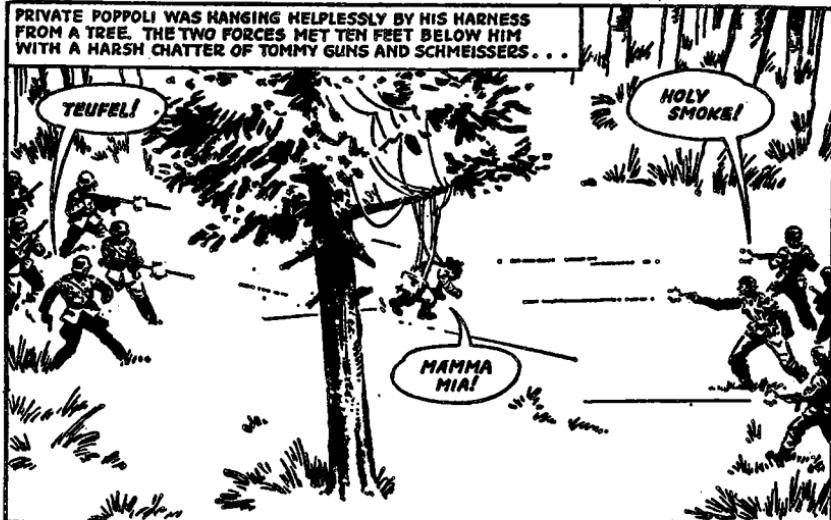


HALF A MILE TO THE WEST, MAJOR KURT BERG, TOO, LED HIS MEN INTO THE TREES. FOR THESE VETERAN PANZER TROOPS, THE REPULSE OF AN ENEMY LANDING FROM THE AIR WAS ALSO ROUTINE . . .



*Chapter 5. The PICNIC*

PRIVATE POPPOLI WAS HANGING HELPLESSLY BY HIS HARNESS FROM A TREE. THE TWO FORCES MET TEN FEET BELOW HIM WITH A HARSH CHATTER OF TOMMY GUNS AND SCHMEISERS . . .



MAJOR BERG FOUND COVER AND DREW A DEEP BREATH. THEN HE GLANCED UPWARDS. HIS EYES GLITTERED . . .

IT IS THE LITTLE ITALIAN! SO . . . THE BRITISH ARE USING HIM, BUT HE WILL BE OF MUCH USE TO ME, TOO . . . WE MUST CAPTURE HIM, MEN!



ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CLEARING, SERGEANT LOGG EASED HIS CRAMPED TRIGGER FINGER AND LOOKED UPWARDS.

CAPTAIN...  
LOOK...  
UP THERE!

WELL, WELL...PRIVATE POPPOLI!  
SERGEANT, I THINK IT'S TIME YOU TOOK  
A SECTION AND WORKED ROUND THE  
BACK OF THOSE JERRIES...WE'VE  
GOT TO GRAB THAT LITTLE MAN  
BEFORE THEY DO!

A VITAL MILITARY TARGET NOW, PRIVATE  
POPPOLI SWUNG MISERABLY IN THE  
BREEZE OF THE BULLETS . . .

HELP!

IT WAS SERGEANT LOGG'S FLANKING MOVEMENT WHICH BROKE THE DEADLOCK. THREATENED ON TWO SIDES, MAJOR BERG GAVE A HARSH ORDER.

ON  
THE FLANK.  
CAPTAIN!

COME ON, MEN...  
ONE OF YOU GET  
POOR OLD POPPOLI  
DOWN...

RETREAT!

LUCKILY FOR MAJOR BERG, FRESH TROOPS HAD ALREADY HURRIED TOWARDS THE SOUND OF THE FIRING. THEY INCLUDED A MORTAR CREW.

GOOD! SET UP YOUR  
MORTAR HERE... RANGE  
TWO HUNDRED... RAPID  
FIRE! NOW WE WILL  
FLUSH OUT THE CURSED  
ENGLANDERS!

## Man Of Destiny

THE FIRST MORTAR BOMB EXPLODED AT THE FOOT OF THE PINE TREE. CAPTAIN CHAMPNEY WAS A DARING SOLDIER, BUT NOT A FOOLHARDY ONE . . .

HECK . . .  
JERRY'S STONKING  
US WITH A MORTAR  
NOW, SIR!

HELP!

WE'LL  
BE CUT TO RIBBONS  
IN THESE TREES!  
GET TO COVER!

THE SECOND MORTAR BOMB FOLLOWED A HIGHER TRAJECTORY AND BURST AGAINST THE BRANCH WHICH SUPPORTED PRIVATE POPPOLI . . .

OWWW!

SO PRIVATE POPPOLI FELL INTO THE HANDS OF THE GERMANS, LITERALLY, A SECOND TIME . . .



THE SMOOTH VOICE OF MAJOR BERG GRATED IN PRIVATE POPPOLI'S BUZZING EARS.

YOU SEEMED EAGER TO REJOIN YOUR GERMAN COMRADES, POPPOLI! COME! I HAVE WORK FOR YOU TO DO!

NO, GENERAL,  
NO... I'M NOT EAGER  
TO JOIN ANYONE! I DON'T  
WANT TO WORK... I WANT  
TO GO HOME . . .



MAJOR BERG WAS IN A HURRY. LEAVING HALF HIS MEN TO HUNT DOWN THE BRITISH RAIDERS, HE HUSTLED POPPOLI INTO THE STAFF CAR . . .



THE TRUCK AND THE STAFF CAR GATHERED SPEED. FROM THE TREES WHICH BORDERED THE ROAD, SHARP EYES WATCHED THEM . . .



AFTER A THIRTY MINUTE RUN, THE STAFF CAR PURRED ON TO A GRAVEL DRIVE. PRIVATE POPPOLI OPENED HIS EYES WIDE . . .



MAJOR BERG TOOK THE LITTLE ITALIAN INTO A BIG ROOM ON THE GROUND FLOOR, ONCE GENERAL BARRANO'S STUDY . . .



## Man Of Destiny

PRIVATE POPPOLI SHUFFLED THE PAPERS TOGETHER WITH THE NEAT HANDS OF A BORN CLERK . . .

THE HERR GENERAL VISITS THE VILLA TO INSPECT THE PAPERS TOMORROW, POPPOLI. THANKS TO YOU, I SHALL HAVE A FULL TRANSLATION READY FOR HIM WHEN HE ARRIVES. JA?

I SEE, GENERAL...  
A TRANSLATION...I SUPPOSE  
THAT'S BETTER THAN  
JUMPING OUT OF  
AEROPLANES...



PRIVATE POPPOLI WORKED THROUGH THE NIGHT. WITH A PEN IN HIS HAND AND THE PAPERS RUSTLING UNDER HIS FINGERS, A DEEP CONTENTMENT STOLE OVER HIM. THIS WAS LIKE HIS OWN PEACEFUL WAR ALL OVER AGAIN . . .

ONLY THREE MORE PAGES . . . WHAT A PIT!/ I HAVEN'T ENJOYED MYSELF SO MUCH SINCE I LEFT THE BARRACKS AT CHIARO.

WHAT WAS THAT?



A HAND SWUNG UP ABOVE THE SILL OF THE OPEN WINDOW. THE GRENADE LANDED WITH A HEART-STOPPING THUMP ON THE PAPERS IN FRONT OF PRIVATE POPPOLI.

U-U-ULP!



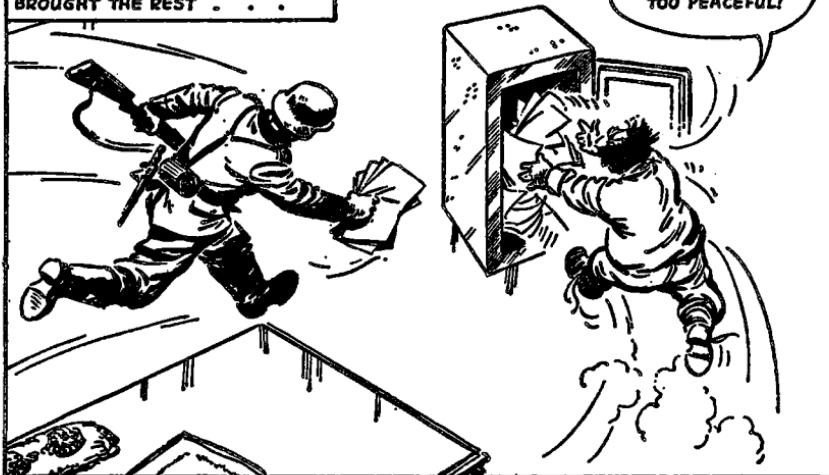
PRIVATE POPPOLI JUST GOGGLED AT THE GRENADE. IT WAS THE GERMAN GUARD WHO SWIPE'D IT OFF THE DESK. FOR A GERMAN, HE THOUGHT QUICKLY . . .

THE  
PAPERS INTO  
THE SAFE!  
SCHNELL!

SI...  
SI...



ON SHAKY LEGS, PRIVATE POPPOLI SCUTTLED ACROSS TO THE METAL SAFE. HE BUNDLED AN ARMFUL OF PAPERS INSIDE. THE GERMAN BROUGHT THE REST . . .



SUDDENLY, THE GRENADE WENT OFF WITH A DEAFENING ROAR. PRIVATE POPPOLI JOINED THE PAPERS IN THE METAL SAFE...



THE WINDOW DARKENED SUDDENLY. THE GERMAN WHIPPED ROUND, SLAMMING THE DOOR OF THE SAFE ON PRIVATE POPPOLI. HIS RIFLE BARKED . . .



THE TYRE MARKS OF MAJOR BERG'S STAFF CAR HAD LED CAPTAIN CHAMPNEY AND HIS MEN TO THE VILLA BARRANO. THEY HAD WAITED UNTIL DAWN, SPYING OUT THE LAND. THEIR ATTACK WAS WELL-PREPARED

OKAY, MEN . . . THAT'S THE  
SAFE ALL RIGHT . . . GET IT!



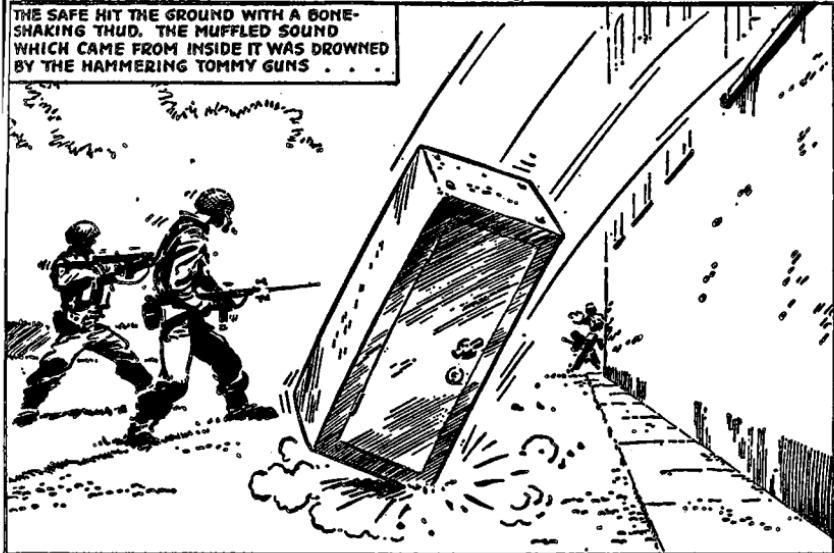
PRIVATE POPPOLI WAS RESUMING HIS UNCOMFORTABLE JOURNEY HOME . . .



THE SAFE WAS MANHANDED ON TO THE WINDOW SILL . . . JUST AS A GROUP OF GERMAN PANZER TROOPS APPEARED ROUND THE CORNER OF THE HOUSE . . .



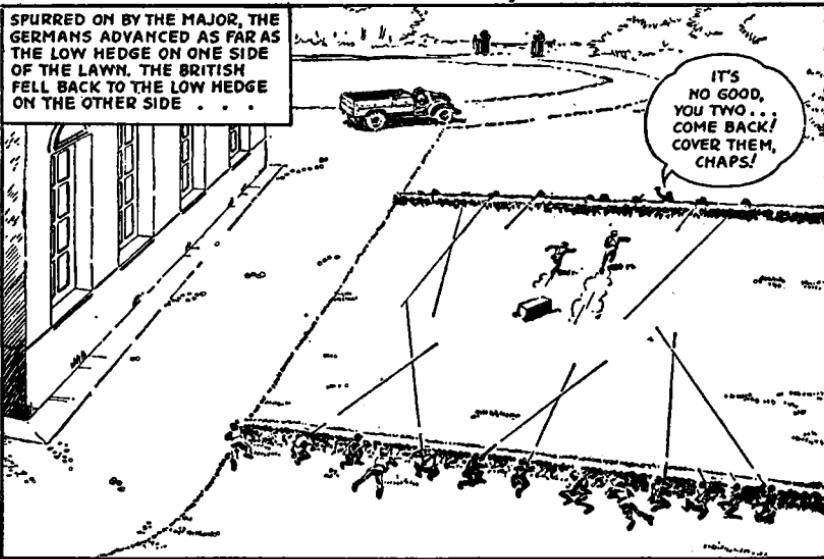
THE SAFE HIT THE GROUND WITH A BONE-SHAKING THUD. THE MUFFLED SOUND WHICH CAME FROM INSIDE IT WAS DROWNED BY THE HAMMERING TOMMY GUNS . . .



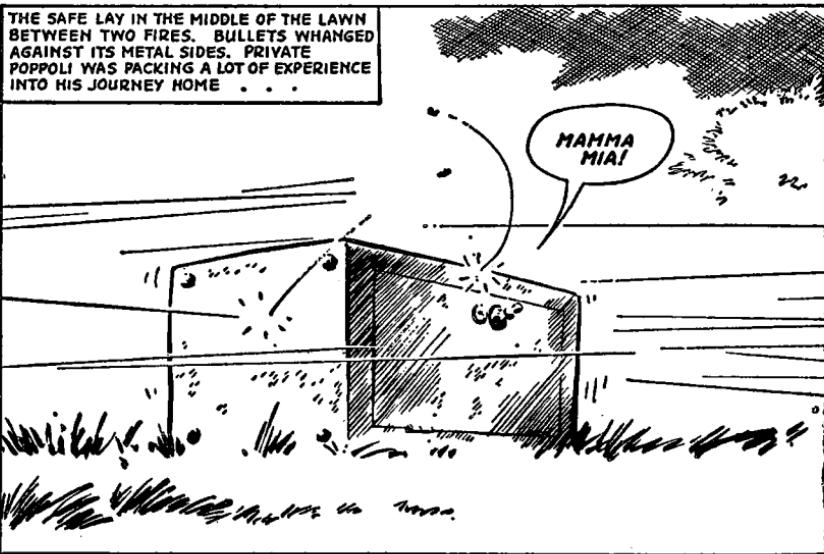
MAJOR BERG JOINED HIS MEN, AS THE TWO BRITISH SOLDIERS WERE STAGGERING ACROSS THE LAWN WITH THE SAFE. HE HOWLED WITH RAGE . . .



## Man Of Destiny



SPURRED ON BY THE MAJOR, THE GERMANS ADVANCED AS FAR AS THE LOW HEDGE ON ONE SIDE OF THE LAWN. THE BRITISH FELL BACK TO THE LOW HEDGE ON THE OTHER SIDE . . .



A FLANK ATTACK DIVIDED THE ATTENTION OF THE S.A.S. MEN. MAJOR BERG LEAPED HOARSELY TO HIS FEET . . .

FORWARD!  
THIS IS OUR  
CHANCE!

BEHIND US/  
WATCH IT!

THE GERMANS HAD REACHED THE  
SAFE BY THE TIME SERGEANT LOGG'S  
SECTION HAD DEALT WITH THE  
FLANK ATTACK. CAPTAIN CHAMPNEY  
RALLIED HIS MEN . . .

DON'T LET THEM  
GET AWAY WITH IT, CHAPS  
. . . FOLLOW ME!

O-OOUF!

THE GERMAN'S FELL BACK BEFORE THE FRESH HAIL OF LEAD. THE SAFE DROPPED WITH A CLANG AGAIN . . .

TALLY-HO, CHAPS!

ACH, THE MAD ENGLANDER!



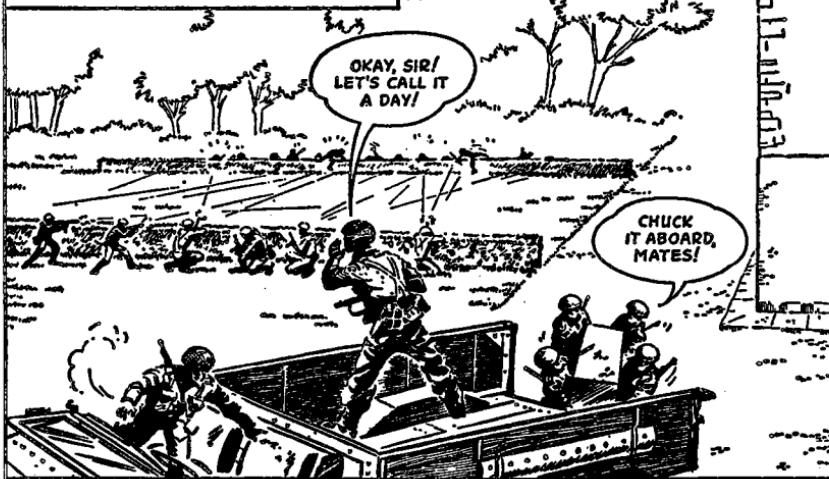
THIS TIME, THE S.A.S. MEN TOOK A FIRM GRIP ON THE SAFE. IT NEEDED FOUR MEN TO CARRY IT, BUT THEY GOT IT TO THEIR SIDE OF THE LAWN. SERGEANT LOGG SHOUTED EAGERLY . . .

SIR . . . THERE'S A TRUCK PARKED ON THE DRIVE BEHIND US!

THE VERY THING, SERGEANT . . . CARRY ON WHILE I DISCOURAGE THE JERRIES.



THE GERMANS WERE DISCOURAGED, WHILE THEY HUGGED THE FLIMSY COVER OF THEIR HEDGE, THE SAFE WAS CARTED ACROSS TO THE TRUCK . . .



THE SAFE DROPPED WITH A CLANG IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK. THE S.A.S. MEN FOLLOWED IT AS THE ENGINE COUGHED AND ROARED.



## Man Of Destiny

THE TRUCK LEAPED FORWARD. IT SHAVED A SLEEK GERMAN-STAFF CAR ON ITS FURIOUS JOURNEY DOWN THE DRIVE. MAJOR BERG LOOKED AT THAT STAFF CAR AND GROANED.



ABOVE THE LAST HECTIC CLATTER OF A TOMMY GUN, AS THE TRUCK LURCHED OUT THROUGH THE GATES OF THE VILLA BARRANO, CAPTAIN CHAMPNEY SIGHED . . .



TWENTY MINUTES LATER, THE TRUCK WAS WELL CLEAR OF PURSUIT IN THE SILENT FOREST . . .

WELL, WE GOT THE PAPERS, CAPTAIN . . . THE R.A.F. BOYS WILL BE ABLE TO PLASTER THOSE SECRET DEFENCES BEFORE THE JERRIES CAN FIND AND USE THEM.

TOO TRUE, SERGEANT! WE MIGHT AS WELL OPEN UP THE SAFE NOW. NO NEED TO CART IT AROUND WITH US . . . WE ONLY WANT WHAT'S INSIDE.

THEY OPENED THE SAFE. THE LITTLE MAN INSIDE IT SAID JUST SIX WORDS, BUT THEY CAME FROM THE BOTTOM OF HIS HEART . . .

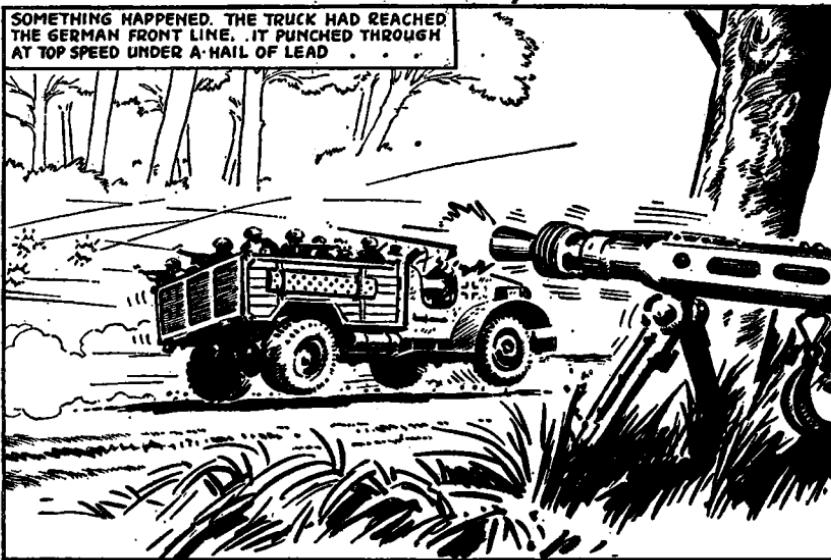
PLEASE CAN I GO HOME NOW?



THE STOLEN TRUCK ROARED ON TOWARDS THE BRITISH LINES. THE SUN WAS BRIGHT. FOR QUITE A LONG WHILE, PRIVATE POPPOLI FELT ALMOST PEACEFUL.



SOMETHING HAPPENED. THE TRUCK HAD REACHED THE GERMAN FRONT LINE. IT PUNCHED THROUGH AT TOP SPEED UNDER A HAIL OF LEAD . . .



IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK, PRIVATE POPPOLI TUCKED HIS HEAD DOWN BETWEEN HIS SHOULDERS AND SIGHED DEEPLY . . .



# Chapter 4. *HOME, SWEET HOME!*

SIX MONTHS LATER, THE BULLETS WERE STILL WHINING ABOVE PRIVATE POPPOLI'S HEAD. IT WAS MAY, 1944, AND THE BATTLEFIELD HAD SHIFTED NORTHWARD TO THE ABRUZZI, BUT THE BULLETS WERE JUST AS NOISY . . .



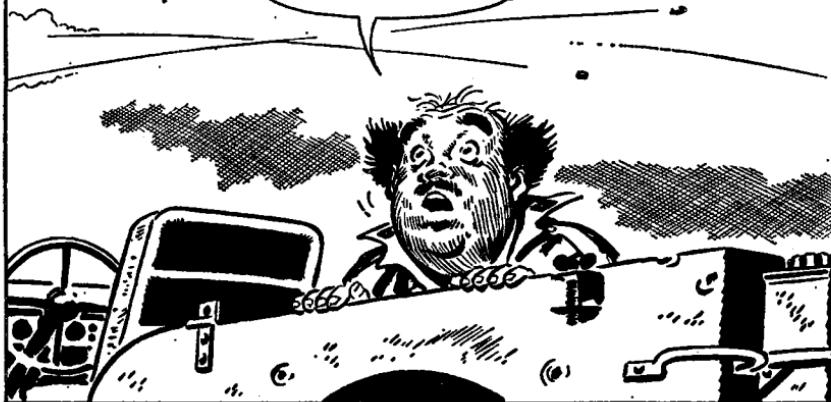
THE EIGHTH ARMY HAD SLOGGED UP TO THE GUSTAV LINE BY THE WINTER OF 1943. THERE THEY HAD STAYED FOR FIVE MONTHS, BOGGED DOWN BY THE WEATHER AND THE GERMANS. PRIVATE POPPOLI HAD BEEN BOGGED DOWN WITH THEM.

TALLY-HO,  
CHAPS!  
LET'S FLUSH OUT  
THE BLIGHTERS!  
FOLLOW ME!



ALL WINTER, THE LITTLE ITALIAN HAD WAITED IMPATIENTLY, SEPARATED FROM HIS HOME TOWN OF CASTELMONTE ONLY BY SIXTY MILES AND A HEDGE OF GERMAN STEEL. THEN, THE EIGHTH ARMY HAD LUNGED FORWARD AGAIN . . .

MAMMA MIA . . . MY EYES  
ARE PLAYING TRICKS ON ME . . .  
IT'S A MIRAGE . . .



BUT IT WAS NOT A MIRAGE THAT PRIVATE POPPOLI SAW ON THAT MORNING IN MAY. IT WAS A SIGNPOST . . .

GO  
FOR THEM  
BALDHEADED,  
CHAPS . . .  
I NEED THE  
EXERCISE!

CASTELMONTE  
10 Kms.

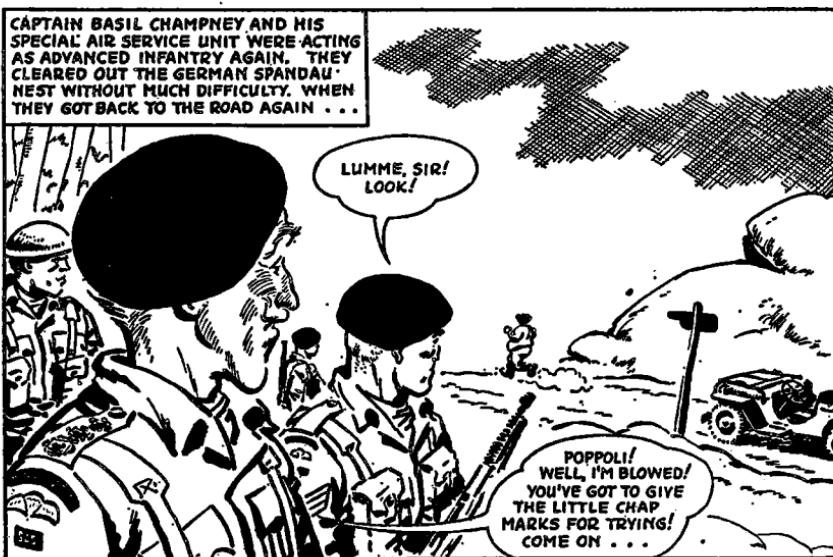
IT DOES  
SAY SO . . .  
CASTELMONTE  
TEN KILOMETROS  
... MIRACULOSO!



STRAY BULLETS STILL SANG OVER THE LITTLE ITALIAN'S HEAD. HE IGNORED THEM NOW. AFTER EIGHT HARROWING MONTHS AND THREE HUNDRED TERRIBLE MILES, PRIVATE POPPOLI WAS NEARING HOME . . .



CAPTAIN BASIL CHAMPNEY AND HIS SPECIAL AIR SERVICE UNIT WERE ACTING AS ADVANCED INFANTRY AGAIN. THEY CLEARED OUT THE GERMAN SPANDAU' NEST WITHOUT MUCH DIFFICULTY. WHEN THEY GOT BACK TO THE ROAD AGAIN . . .



THE JEEP CAUGHT UP WITH PRIVATE POPPOLI TWO HUNDRED YARDS ALONG THE ROAD. HE LOOKED UP, BUT HE DID NOT STOP WALKING...



THE SMILE UNDER CAPTAIN CHAMPNEY'S MOUSTACHE WAS A KINDLY ONE . . .



PRIVATE POPPOLI STOOD UP EXCITEDLY IN THE JEEP AS IT CLIMBED THE ROAD TO THE LITTLE TOWN . . .



IT WAS MARKET DAY IN CASTELMONTE, BUT BUSINESS WAS SLACK. ONE REASON FOR THIS WAS THE PRESENCE OF THREE LARGE ARMY TRUCKS AND A STAFF CAR IN THE MARKET SQUARE.



THE TRUCKS AND THE STAFF CAR BELONGED TO THE WEHRMACHT. THE HARSH VOICE OF THE OFFICER BELONGED TO OBERLEUTNANT KURT BERG . . .

WE WILL LEAVE THE TOWN IMMEDIATELY, CORPORAL. THE HERR GENERAL IS FORMING A NEW DEFENSIVE LINE TO THE NORTH. FOLLOW MY CAR!



THE BURLY GERMAN HAD BEEN REDUCED IN RANK AFTER THE AFFAIR AT THE VILLA BARRANO. IT HAD NOT IMPROVED HIS TEMPER. THE PEOPLE OF CASTELMONTE HEARD HIS ANNOUNCEMENT WITH DELIGHT.

MIRACOLOSO!  
YOU HEAR ... THE TEDESCHI  
ARE LEAVING CASTELMONTE!  
THERE WILL BE NO  
FIGHTING HERE!



A GERMAN SOLDIER HAD BEEN POSTED AS A LOOKOUT AT THE SOUTHERN END OF THE TOWN ...

THE ENGLANDERS,  
HERR OBERLEUTNANT,  
MANY JEEPS! UP THE HILL  
FROM THE SOUTH THEY COME,  
TOWARDS CASTELMONTE.



## Man Of Destiny

OBERLEUTNANT BERG SMILED HARSHLY. HE HAD AN OLD SCORE TO SETTLE WITH THE BRITISH, AND HE LIKED AMBUSHES.

WE WILL STAY A LITTLE, MEN . . . LONG ENOUGH TO WELCOME THE ENGLANDERS! HIDE THE TRUCKS ROUND THE CORNER! SAFETY CATCHES OFF! RAPID FIRE WHEN I GIVE THE WORD!

DOLOROSO . . .  
CASTELMONTE WILL BE A BATTLEFIELD!

THE TOWNSFOLK SCATTERED FEARFULLY AS THE ROAR OF ENGINES SWELLED FROM THE SOUTH. THE GERMANS WERE ALREADY HIDDEN

THE ENGLISH COME . . . WHY COULD THEY NOT LEAVE US ALONE?

THE TEDÈSCHI WOULD HAVE GONE IN PEACE IF THEY HAD NOT COME POKING THEIR NOSES IN!

IT WAS A DESERTED CASTELMONTE WHICH PRIVATE POPPOLI RETURNED TO IN TRIUMPH AFTER HIS SERVICE IN THE WARS.

ATTENZIONE, AMICI !  
WHERE ARE YOU? IT IS I, POPPOLI!  
YOUR TOWN CLERK IS BACK  
TO PUT YOUR AFFAIRS IN  
ORDER!



THE JEEPS PULLED UP IN THE DESERTED SQUARE. PRIVATE POPPOLI CLIMBED DOWN. HE STOOD STILL FOR A LONG HAPPY MOMENT. HIS JOURNEY WAS OVER . . .

AH . . .  
THIS IS CASTELMONTE,  
GENERAL! LISTEN TO THE  
SILENCE . . . THE QUIETNESS  
. . . THE PEACEFULNESS!



## Man Of Destiny

IT WAS THEN THAT OBERLEUTNANT KURT BERG  
SPRANG HIS TRAP... AND THE MARKET  
SQUARE OF CASTELMONTE EXPLODED IN  
PRIVATE POPPOLI'S FACE.



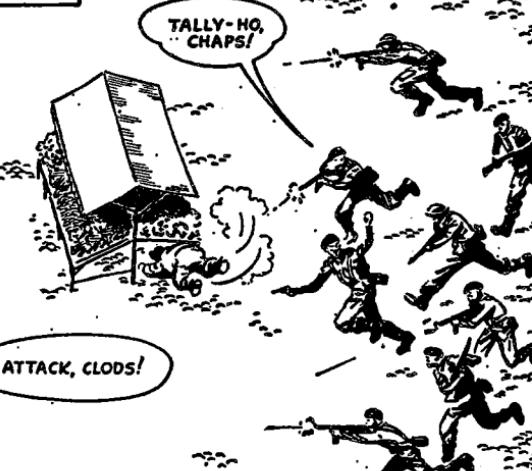
CAPTAIN CHAMPNEY REACTED SWIFTLY  
AND AGGRESSIVELY TO THE GERMAN  
CHALLENGE ...



PRIVATE POPPOLI HAD TURNED AWAY FROM THE GERMAN ONSLAUGHT. HE WAS JUST IN TIME TO FACE THE FIRST WITHERING BURST OF BRITISH FIRE ...



CAPTAIN CHAMPNEY AND OBERLEUTNANT BERG LED THEIR RESPECTIVE SIDES IN A BLISTERING CHARGE ACROSS THE CLUTTERED SQUARE OF CASTELMONTE.



## Man Of Destiny

THE ROARING ENGINES OF THE BELLIGERENTS  
DIED AWAY IN THE DISTANCE, PEACE RETURNED  
TO THE MARKET SQUARE OF CASTELMONTE.  
PRIVATE POPPOLI STOOD ALONE IN THE MIDST  
OF THE DESOLATION AND GROANED . . .



THE TOWNSFOLK EMERGED INTO  
THE DEVASTATED SUNLIGHT . . .

POPPOLI . . .  
SO IT WAS HIM!

HE HAS NOT COME  
BACK FROM THE WAR . . .  
HE HAS BROUGHT IT  
WITH HIM!

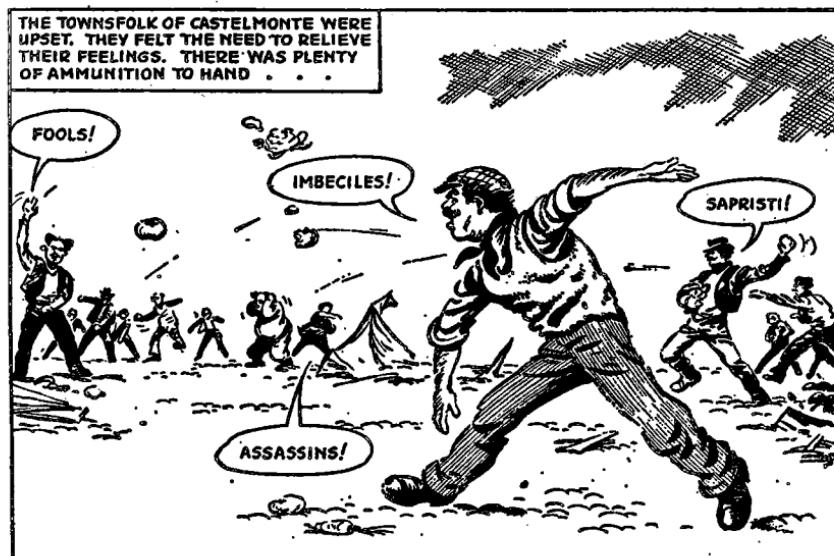
HE WILL  
PUT OUR AFFAIRS  
IN ORDER, HE  
SAYS!





SOME VOICES WERE RAISED IN PRIVATE POPPOLI'S DEFENCE . . .

THE TOWNSFOLK OF CASTELMONTE WERE UPSET. THEY FELT THE NEED TO RELIEVE THEIR FEELINGS. THERE WAS PLENTY OF AMMUNITION TO HAND . . .



PRIVATE POPPOLI HAD SAID  
NOTHING ALL THIS WHILE.  
WHEN THE VEGETABLES  
BEGAN TO FLY, HE TUCKED  
HIS HEAD INTO HIS  
SHOULDERS WITH AN EASE  
BORN OF LONG PRACTICE.  
HE SIGHED DEEPLY . . .



AFTER THREE HUNDRED MILES AND A LOAD OF  
TROUBLES, PRIVATE POPPOLI WAS HOME . . .



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